

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

105th Congress
2nd Session

Vote No. 88

April 21, 1998, 3:02 pm
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EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNTS/Merit Pay, Teacher Testing

SUBJECT: Education Savings Act for Public and Private Schools . . . H.R. 2646. Mack/D'Amato amendment No. 2288, as amended.

ACTION: AMENDMENT AGREED TO, 63-35

SYNOPSIS: As amended, H.R. 2646, the Parent and Student Savings Account PLUS Act, will enact the compromise provisions of S. 1133, as reported, on education savings accounts and other education initiatives. It will expand the recently enacted education savings account tax credit, will provide an exclusion from gross income for distributions from qualified State tuition programs, will extend and expand the current-law section 127 tax exclusion (for employer-provided education assistance), and will assist local governments in issuing bonds for school construction by increasing the small-issuer bond exemption. The bill will also enact a proposal to give school construction aid to high growth districts. In total, approximately \$6 billion in tax relief for education over the next 10 years will be provided. That cost will be more than fully offset by modifying the employer deduction for vacation pay and by changing the treatment of the foreign tax credit carryback and carryforward periods (for increased revenues of \$6.9 billion over 10 years). The education tax credit will be expanded by increasing the annual contribution limit for education IRAs from \$500 to \$2,000 for taxable years 1999 through 2002 and by changing the definition of qualified education expenses to include kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) expenses (the credit currently applies only to higher education expenses).

The Mack/D'Amato amendment, as amended, would add the MERIT (Measures to Encourage Results in Teaching) Act, which would give States incentives to establish teacher merit pay programs and programs to test teachers in the subjects they teach. Funding would come from the Eisenhower Professional Development Program for teachers. Existing program funding would not be diverted; instead, 50 percent of any increase over the fiscal year 1999 funding level would be used to give incentives. Additionally, States would be permitted to use other Federal education funds to pay for merit programs or teacher testing.

(See other side)

YEAS (63)			NAYS (35)		NOT VOTING (2)	
Republicans (54 or 100%)	Democrats (9 or 20%)		Republicans (0 or 0%)	Democrats (35 or 80%)	Republicans (1)	Democrats (1)
Abraham	Hutchinson	Boxer	Akaka	Johnson	Bennett- ²	Moynihan- ²
Allard	Hutchison	Breaux	Baucus	Kennedy		
Ashcroft	Inhofe	Byrd	Biden	Kerrey		
Bond	Jeffords	Feinstein	Bingaman	Kerry		
Brownback	Kempthorne	Hollings	Bryan	Lautenberg		
Burns	Kyl	Kohl	Bumpers	Levin		
Campbell	Lott	Landrieu	Cleland	Lieberman		
Chafee	Lugar	Leahy	Conrad	Mikulski		
Coats	Mack	Torricelli	Daschle	Moseley-Braun		
Cochran	McCain		Dodd	Murray		
Collins	McConnell		Dorgan	Reed		
Coverdell	Murkowski		Durbin	Reid		
Craig	Nickles		Feingold	Robb		
D'Amato	Roberts		Ford	Rockefeller		
DeWine	Roth		Glenn	Sarbanes		
Domenici	Santorum		Graham	Wellstone		
Enzi	Sessions		Harkin	Wyden		
Faircloth	Shelby		Inouye			
Frist	Smith, Bob					
Gorton	Smith, Gordon					
Gramm	Snowe					
Grams	Specter					
Grassley	Stevens					
Gregg	Thomas					
Hagel	Thompson					
Hatch	Thurmond					
Helms	Warner					

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

- 1—Official Business
- 2—Necessarily Absent
- 3—Illness
- 4—Other

SYMBOLS:

- AY—Announced Yea
- AN—Announced Nay
- PY—Paired Yea
- PN—Paired Nay

Those favoring the amendment contended:

Last year Congress provided \$335 million for the Eisenhower teacher development program, which was \$25 million more than it provided the previous year. We very much support that large increase because experience has shown that a great teacher can make all the difference in the world. The most impressive display of this principle we have ever seen was in Anyim Palmer's Marcus Garvey School in Los Angeles, California. In that school, we heard 2-year-olds reciting the alphabet in three languages; we saw 3-year-old children doing complicated arithmetic problems; we heard 5-year-olds recite all the Presidents of the United States in chronological order. This school, which is in a very poor neighborhood, and which draws all its students from the local community, challenged the sixth grade students from one of the richest, most exclusive private schools in Los Angeles to compete against its third grade students in Math and English. Its third grade students won. If this school did not exist everyone would insist that it was impossible for it to exist. When we asked school officials how they had accomplished so much, their answer was simple: "It's the teacher that makes the difference."

Unfortunately, this simple principle is often ignored in America's public schools. In almost any other occupation, excellence is rewarded with pay increases and promotions. Teachers, though, are paid the same whether they are good or bad at their jobs. An outstanding teacher may get a plaque and a pat on the back after a decade or two of service, but we think much more should be given. Few jobs are as important as educating our children; those people who excel at teaching should be properly rewarded for the great job that they do. Further, incompetence should not be tolerated, because the victims of that incompetence are the children who do not learn. Most schools do not periodically test their teachers to make sure that they are competent to teach the subjects that they have been hired to teach, and, in fact, teachers often lack such competency. For instance, in public schools today: 25 percent of math teachers do not have even a minor in mathematics or mathematics instruction; 39 percent of life science or biology instructors do not have even a minor in the field; and 56 percent of physical science teachers lack at least a minor in physics, chemistry, geology, or Earth sciences. The problem is the worst in inner-city schools, where students have less than a 50-percent chance of getting a science or math teacher with a degree in the subject he or she teaches.

The Mack/D'Amato amendment would give States a financial incentive to test their teachers to ensure competence and to start merit pay programs to reward excellence. No Federal mandates would be imposed; States would decide for themselves on measures of competence and excellence. Further, those States that decided not to adopt testing or merit pay programs would not be punished in any way. This amendment advances the twin principles that our children deserve to have competent teachers, and that excellent teachers deserve to be rewarded. We urge our colleagues to give it their support.

No arguments were expressed in opposition to the amendment.